

Death on the Clyde

The headline above was selected by a voluntary worker at *Clydeside Action on Asbestos*, a small office down by the Briggait. In deference to him The Keelie has used it. But if anything the headline understates the case: it could read MURDER ON THE CLYDE. Like the rest of his colleagues the voluntary worker is a victim of asbestosis, a former shipyard worker on the Clyde.

The ramifications surrounding asbestos and the asbestos industry are very intricate. It is a complex and murky world of suppression, of official deals and counter deals, political corruption at local and national level. One thing is clear; what is happening in this country is an obscenity. A political obscenity and a social obscenity.

Asbestos attacks the lungs, colon, larynx; stomach, chest and heart. Those suffering from mesothelioma have to confront the fact that this disease has no known cure. In the past year alone three hundred of those who came to *Clydeside Action on Asbestos* have died of asbestos-related diseases. They came looking for support in their fight for some sort of justice. They sought cash allowances under the Diseases Benefit Scheme run by the DSS, or financial compensation for themselves and their families from the big business interests responsible for their plight. If successful they would have received a pittance; in far too many cases they received nothing at all. Many of those who died were aware of the reality facing them, they knew it was a matter of time.

A large proportion of victims are former shipyard workers, especially joiners, electricians and pipe-laggers; men whose daily work put them in direct contact with asbestos dust. But beyond this particular group there are thousands of others. The figures are so vast and the stakes so high that the true facts about what is happening are suppressed. Not only facts about the figures involved, but facts about how our society treats these victims. For thousands of shipyard workers society's "reward" for the years they spent building the "best ships in the world" is acute physical suffering and an early death. They must also confront the fact that the entire system is rigged to stop them getting a just settlement. Without the support of their fellow victims at *Clydeside Action on Asbestos* the chances of receiving anything is extremely remote.

If you consider that one firm (Turner & Newall) had to fork out £11.4 million on claim settlements for last year alone then you have some idea of the cash involved. If that's what they were forced to pay what sort of claims did they manage

to avoid? This enormous slush fund is designed for one purpose: to STOP justice being done.

The rightful compensation claims of thousands and thousands of people are being checked and thwarted. The process involves a variety of groups; lawyers, solicitors, doctors; insurance companies and diverse bureaucrats, the DSS and agencies of the Social Works Department, etc. The slush fund is used to influence that process. The people targeted by those in control of the slush fund will include the professional groups referred to.

In future issues *The Keelie* will try to highlight some of the battles being fought by the victims. In deference to the voluntary team at *Clydeside Action on Asbestos* it is crucial that the public be made aware of the part played by the DSS.

The scandal of the Dss Adjudicating Officers

The DSS is an arm of state-control, a sort of secret police. Its workers sign the Official Secrets Act and it's got priority over almost every other government agency. There's one astonishing power it has in relation to the claims of the victims of asbestos-related diseases.

Getting the allowances due you is a long and complicated process. The DSS requires proof that the disease you have is an effect of asbestos. This means consultation and examination with many different doctors: your own G.P., three from the pneumoconiosis panel-board plus three or more at the respiratory department at the Royal Infirmary (which is a tougher test than qualifying for the Olympic Games). Sometimes the claimant must undergo a biopsy to provide proof to the authorities. Or to undergo two biopsies. Sometimes even three biopsies.

Let's be clear about what a biopsy is; it is a major operation; the patient goes under the knife. The medics search inside your lungs and other parts of your body for traces of dust. A great many patients die as a result of these biopsies. In some cases the death rate is a staggering 7 out of 10. Thus in the act of providing 'proof' of their condition to the DSS they end up being killed. The record is so gruesome that experienced workers at *Clydeside Action on Asbestos* advice claimants to steer clear of the operating table. Those who refuse the biopsy are known by the authorities as "Hostile Patients".

However, many are "obliged" to endure the operation. If you survive that ordeal, and the rest of the medical rules and regulations, you're then faced with the ultimate test.

The ultimate test is the DSS Adjudicating Officer. For the purpose of the Diseases Benefit Scheme the person who finally decides if a victim suffers from an asbestos-related disease is not a doctor, nor is it two doctors, nor is it even seven doctors. The final judge is the Adjudicating Officer at the DSS. He or she holds absolute and discretionary power. This DSS official takes the findings of the medical profession and then decides if the victim should receive the pittance of an allowance due to those afflicted by asbestos-related diseases. It doesn't matter if your own G.P. tells you that you have asbestosis. The Adjudicating Officer decides whether you've got it "officially".

Who is the Adjudicating Officer? Nobody knows. Their identity is a closely guarded secret. We do know that the role shifts. Different workers get the job on a day-to-day basis. Some of them may be little more than school-leavers. They 'examine' the findings of the medical profession then award or reject individual claims. It's incredible!

Our Labour District Council was responsible for "awarding" Frank Sinatra close on a million quid for a day's work then lost a cool £10 to £15 million on a 9-month temporary heritage-exhibition. All done to attract big business to the city. But what happens to the victims of big business? The same Council gives a miserly £750 to *Clydeside Action on Asbestos* while their Strathclyde Regional "comrades" gave a paltry £1000. It is a shocking and disgraceful state of affairs.

Immediate support and solidarity

Clydeside Action on Asbestos is unable to register as a charity. From their paltry budget they must pay rates and rents on top of everything else, eg. electricity, telephone, stationery; heating, furniture, photocopying, general office and travel expenditure. This is patently impossible on the pathetic grants they get from district and region. A couple of weeks ago the Sheriff Officers arrived to poind their equipment for rates' arrears. But their equipment is so grossly inadequate there was nothing to poind. When the Sheriff Officers grasped the set-up they wound up putting a few bob in the "tea-jar", then made an embarrassed exit.

Clydeside Action on Asbestos needs immediate support and solidarity from the people of Glasgow and elsewhere in Scotland. Their situation is desperate. The wealthy elite responsible for such untold suffering are using millions of pounds to bend the system and stop justice being done. To reverse the process the victims of the asbestos industry must be given total support from the public, both in

expressions of solidarity and donations of money or resources. Contact should be made directly with *Clydeside Action on Asbestos*. Anyone requiring advice and support on asbestos-related diseases and compensation claims or cash allowances should also make immediate contact for fuller information.

Hurting the Asbestos Victims

In the last edition we mentioned the nightmare situation facing thousands of asbestos victims and their families. Now the latest news: members of the Government want to aid the suffering millionaires at Lloyds who are "forced" to settle the legitimate claims of asbestos victims.

Imagine the Tories baling out the bookies with tax payers' money because they had one bad day at Ascot. The other 364 days were okay, the profits as massive as usual, but on this one day of the year a few of the punters knocked it off. That sums up the situation.

The vast proportion of claims are from the U.S.A. This is because justice exists there in a way that it doesn't at home. How could it when some of the 'names' or 'ex-names' associated with the world's biggest insurance bookies are actually members of the Government!

One of the 62 Tory MP with a Lloyds' interest is Ian Lang, as an 'ex-name' he remains liable for three years. As Scottish Secretary of State he is the man at the top. His is the last court of refuge for asbestos victims and their families. But what chance have you got in any court where the judge is one of the very people who gains financially by denying your claim? It's an obscene situation.

Every single institution in this country is geared to stop asbestos victims receiving justice. Money talks. From the medical profession to the legal profession, from the DHSS to the political process itself. Such people literally profit from the dead and suffering. Power and influence is what the victims are up against. And apart from self-help organisations like *Clydeside Action on Asbestos* they are forced to fight alone.

It was no surprise that the Labour Party's first response was to back the suffering millionaires of Lloyds. The part played by the Labour Party and trades union hierarchy is a disgrace to the Labour Movement. Instead of fighting on behalf of the victims of industrial disease the Labour leadership fight for those who dirty their hands in profiting by it. Asbestos is a cancer on society. So too is greed.

More DSS Stormtroopers; The Compensation Recovery Unit

In the battlefield of industrial disease the whole weight of the rich and powerful is brought to bear against working-class people. That's only to be expected. The middle and upper classes don't get industrial diseases. In fact we'd be better calling it "workers' disease".

It's a totally one-sided fight. Big business and the insurance companies have the heaviest 'support-groups' going, including the British Government. Then they've got the politicians and the medical profession, and the legal profession, not to mention the media; plus the actual Law of the Land which is designed to protect their interests and their interests alone. Ask anybody who's ever fought a case.

Who do the victims get to help them? Their families and each other. They should be helped by the unions and so-called 'left-wing' parties, but on far too many occasions these full-time officials and 'left' politicians just sell out to the bosses. If it wasn't for volunteer groups then they'd be at the mercy of the rich and powerful. So only a tiny fraction of all the tens of thousands of people who contract horrific, fatal, diseases like mesothelioma ever succeed in winning justice.

Now the rich have been given a new weapon from the Tory Government: the Compensation Recovery Unit. This special DSS team lurks in the shadows, like a vampire, ready to suck back a large proportion of any compensation due to the victims. The DSS say they're entitled to steal this money because the victims received Disability Allowance while fighting to win the compensation. They say every last penny in sick-money paid out to the victims has to be given back.

But why the hell should they! You pay these contributions for 10, 20 or 40 years then get forced onto the panel because of some horrible disease you catch while doing your job of work. All these years paying national insurance. That's what it's for. It's your sick-money. It's not just immoral what the DSS is doing, it's illegal! So where are all the union lawyers? Surely they're not all 'bent'? Or are they...

But what kind of people are they who steal from the weak and dying? What sort of country is this that will allow such injustice?

The C.A.T. Scan Campaign for Asbestos Victims

This is a national campaign being launched on behalf of Scottish victims of the asbestos industry. There are two immediate aims: 1) to raise a sum of money that will allow a CAT Scan for every person who feels s/he is suffering from the effects of asbestos exposure. 2) to highlight the need for the CAT Scan as a

formality within our national health service.

Under the existing rules and regulations people who seek cash allowances under the Diseases Benefit Scheme run by the DSS have to prove 'causation'. They have to show that the disability they have is a direct effect of exposure to asbestos dust. What this means is that traces of asbestos dust have to be found inside them, usually in their lungs. It isn't enough that a man's work-record shows he has been working directly with asbestos for the past forty or fifty years, nor is it enough that a man's wife has been laundering his workclothes for that period of time. The state requires further 'evidence'. In other words if you exhibit the symptoms of asbestos-related diseases plus the fact that you have been exposed directly to asbestos dust - through no fault of your own - is not regarded as proof that you are a victim of asbestos dust. .